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# News Release

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## **SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA FAILING TO MAKE THE GRADE**

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*New SCAG Report Gives Region Low Marks for Transportation, Housing, Income and Other Policy Areas*

**LOS ANGELES, CA** – Traffic congestion, the lack of affordable housing and a huge loss of high-paying manufacturing jobs present major challenges to maintaining Southern California’s quality of life, according to a new State of the Region report released today by the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG). The State of the Region serves as an annual “Report Card” for the six-county SCAG region, rating its performance in seven policy categories, including transportation, employment, income, housing, air quality, safety and education.

“Southern California is one of the most dynamic gateway regions in the world, but the challenges we face are severe,” said Riverside Mayor Ron Loveridge, who chairs the SCAG committee that developed the report. “Without accessibility to affordable housing, livable wages and a quality education, Southern Californians will not be able to succeed in the competitive global economy. This report represents a call to action for our local government and business leaders to some serious threats to our quality of life.”

### **Affordable Housing Hard to Come By**

With a continued dearth of affordable, available housing, Southern California’s housing grade fell from a **C-** in 2000 to a **D+** in this year’s report. One of the report’s more significant findings is that a growing percentage of Southern California residents are paying more than 30 percent of their total income on housing than their counterparts in the New York and San Francisco metro areas. Despite ever-rising mortgages and rents, California had the lowest percentage of unoccupied units (5.8 percent) in the nation in 2000. In Southern California, the number of residents in crowded housing (more than one person per room) stands at 20 percent, nearly 10 percent higher than that of most major metropolitan areas in the U.S. Home-ownership rates in Southern California continued to lag behind the nation in 2001.

“A critical challenge for the Southern California region will be to find ways to nurture and accelerate the upward mobility of our low-income residents,” said Brea Mayor Bev Perry, SCAG’s first vice-president. “So many of these issues are interrelated. Lower income residents tend to have fewer educational opportunities that will allow them to obtain better paying jobs. Without higher wages, they cannot afford a home. Thus, we must work together as a region to solve this problem from a variety of approaches.”

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### **Traffic Jams Worsen**

Southern California again ranked as the most congested metropolitan area in the nation, earning a **D** for the fourth year in a row. Regionally, the average travel time to work increased by about three minutes in each direction from 26 to 29 minutes, ranking it fifth highest among the nine largest metropolitan regions. Inland Empire commuters continued to have the highest average travel time to work at about 30 minutes. On the positive side, Southern California continued to hold the nation's highest carpooling rates.

"We all know how bad traffic congestion is today, and it will only worsen unless we make significant investments in our transportation infrastructure," said Temecula City Councilman Ron Roberts, chair of SCAG's Transportation Committee. "Today's report not only illustrates the state of traffic congestion in Southern California, it also highlights a real need to keep transportation improvements near the top of the policy radar screen."

### **The Silver Linings**

Despite all of the gloomy findings, SCAG found that the skies in Southern California are clearer thanks to a decrease in vehicle emissions, which has resulted in less air pollution. During the last decade, the region has consistently reduced in the number of days it has exceeded federal or state standard for ozone and carbon monoxide. In 2001, the region only exceeded federal standards for PM10, particles of dust, soot and dirt that are small enough to be absorbed into the lungs, on three sample days – an 83 percent decrease from 1985. As a result, the air quality grade rose from a **C** in 1998 to a **B-** in this year's report.

The SCAG region also remains one of the nation's most vital gateways for international trade with the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach ranking second and third respectively, and Los Angeles International Airports ranked eighth.

Southern California also scored mixed grades in the other four areas:

- **Employment (B)** - Despite a loss of 200,000 manufacturing jobs, the majority of which were aerospace-related positions, during the 1990s, the region's economic base was more diversified in 2001, with stronger roles in international trade, entertainment and tourism and business services, making it more resilient to economic downturns.
- **Income (C)** - The Southern California region has plummeted from the fourth highest per capita income among the 17 largest metropolitan regions in the nation to 7<sup>th</sup> place in 1990 and 16<sup>th</sup> in 2000.
- **Education (D)** – In 2000, the region ranked last among large metropolitan regions in the percentage of persons with a high school diploma or higher education. In 2001, high school dropout rates increased in Los Angeles County, while Imperial and Ventura had noticeable reductions.

**2002 State of the Region**

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- **Safety (B)** – During the 1990s, rates of violent crime and juvenile felony arrests went down in every county in the region. However, the violent crime rate in Los Angeles County increased by more than five percent between 1999 and 2000. Within the region, Ventura and Orange Counties had the lowest violent crime rates in 2000.

For more information about SCAG's State of the Region Report, please call Jeff Lustgarten at 323/466-3445. To view the complete report, visit the SCAG Web site at [www.scag.ca.gov](http://www.scag.ca.gov).

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